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THE RISE OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN ILLINOIS FROM THE BEGINNING TO THE YEAR 1832.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE MARCH OF METHODISM INTO THE NORTHWEST

The position of Methodism in America was not very secure until after the Revolutionary War. It had been previously established, but was greatly weakened by the struggle of the Americans for independence.¹ Its relations with the British caused people to question its value for Americans. In addition to this the excitement, confusion, and strife of the war sapped its strength, and prevented its growth. It had yet to be successfully introduced into New England, had not entered the west, and was only fairly well established in the central states and in the south.

At the Christmas Conference of 1784, American Methodism was cut loose from the British and organized as a distinctly American Church. By this time the war was over, and the local preachers and the circuit riders were ready to accompany in some instances and to follow in others the settlers to the west. But both the settlers and the church were held back by the mountains, the uncultivated condition of the interior of the country, and the Indians. These, however, were only hindrances and did not prevent the westward expansion of either church or empire.

The great northwest included the vast territory bounded by the Alleghanies on the east, the Ohio river on the south, the Mississippi river on the west and Canada on the north. From this

1. Stevens, Abel "History of the Methodist Episcopal Church." Vol. 1, page 442.

territory has been formed the five great states of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and Wisconsin. The early history of the territory is French. The works of Francis Parkman, and the volumes of the Jesuit Relations tell of many thrilling events of an ancient realm. The Jesuits were the early missionaries. Lines of forts and trading centers stretched along the Lakes and down the Ohio, Wabash, Illinois, and Mississippi rivers. But this came to a close in 1763 when this vast empire was ceded to England. The valor of George Rogers Clark in 1778 and the skill of our commissioners in France at the close of the Revolutionary War secured this territory for the United States. Previous to the war many Americans moved west into and just across the mountains. Fort Pitt, later Pittsburg, and the settlements on the Kentucky and Kanawha rivers formed the frontier. After the war several states claimed sections of this land, but by the Ordinance² of 1787 it was made national domain.

The close of the Revolution brought a new era to the west. The population of the seaboard states was free to emigrate. Naturally immigration along the entire frontier increased, while the settlers rapidly pushed the frontier westward. Roads were built and guarded, and immigrants passed along these and the rivers in ever increasing numbers. Access to the western country was gained by following the valleys in the Alleghanies, going through the passes, and then along the trails and down the rivers. The Cumberland Gap was one of the chief outlets to the west, and being farther south aided the territory, now the States of Kentucky and Tennessee, to be settled first. In addition to the influence of the Cumberland Gap there were two facts that caused the settlement of Kentucky and Tennessee to be accomplished previous to that of the Northwest. There were no tribes of Indians of importance that made their home in eastern Kentucky, but all used it as a hunting ground. Because of this the pressure of the Indians was lighter here and the settlers were able to gain a better foothold. In contrast to this the Northwestern Indians hotly contested the invasion of the whites in the Northwest and as their lands reached south to the banks of the Ohio the passage down

2. Old South leaflets. (General Ser.) No. 13. Boston, 1888.

this river was very dangerous. Consequently much of the Northwest was approached by the way of Kentucky. In 1792 Kentucky was admitted to the Union. This coupled with the defeat of the Northwestern Indians by "Mad" Antony Wayne in the Battle of the Fallen Timbers in 1794 made ready the rapid settlement of the Northwest.³

The expansion of the church followed closely upon the settlers. "Many Methodists had emigrated, during the war, to the mountains of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia,"⁴ and among them were local preachers who were the founders of Methodism in these new quarters.

The Holston Circuit, including the southwestern section of Virginia and the territory across the line in Tennessee, was the first form of organized ministerial work west of the Alleghanies. Jeremiah Lambert⁵ was assigned to the work in 1783 and reported seventy-six members to the conference the next year. Lambert was the first minister sent to the ultra-mountains part of the continent. He was probably preceded by local preachers who came during the early years of the Revolution.

The Red Stone Circuit, in western Pennsylvania, was the first form of organized work beyond the Pennsylvania mountains. As early as 1781 a local preacher labored in the Red Stone country. In 1784 it first appeared in the minutes,⁶ so was probably organized in 1783-84.

In 1788 Bishop Asbury first crossed the mountains in his travels. During his lifetime he crossed them sixty times.⁷ The first conference beyond the mountains was held in May at Half Acres and Keywoods.⁸ A few weeks later at a conference at Uniontown, Pennsylvania, occurred what is supposed to have been the first ordination⁹ west of the Mountains.

3. These facts were gathered from Roosevelt's "Winning of the West."

4. Stevens, Abel "History of the Methodist Episcopal Church." Vol. 1, page 135.

5. Minutes of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. 1, pages 17-20.

6. Minutes of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. 1, page 20.

7. McTyeire, Holland N. "History of Methodism." page 365.

8. The location of these places is disputed. All are agreed that they are beyond the mountains, either in Virginia or Tennessee. Ibid., pages 365, 366. Stevens, Abel Vol. II., pages 272, 353.

9. Stevens, Abel Vol. II. pages 274, 275.

As early as 1783 Methodist local preachers¹⁰ entered the territory, which is now the state of Kentucky. Daniel Boone had preceded them by less than fifteen years. In 1786 Methodist itinerants began work in Kentucky. Two years later there were three circuits which reported a total of five hundred thirty-nine members. In 1790 they reported¹¹ almost three times as many members. This year Asbury again crossed the mountains¹² and entered the wilds of Kentucky. The first conference¹³ held in Kentucky began on May 14, 1790, near Lexington. An academy was founded at this time, called Bethel, which afterwards failed. The effort is of importance in showing what Methodism did and attempted to do for the west. When Kentucky was admitted into the Union the Methodists had four circuits and a membership of two thousand two hundred thirty-five.

With the introduction of Methodism into Ohio, the work in the great Northwest properly begins. It is reported that in 1787 the first Methodist sermon was preached in Ohio and the Northwest Territory by Reverend George Callahan.¹⁴ In 1793, Francis Clark¹⁵ entered the same work in the southern part of the state, Callahan having been in the eastern. Four years later Francis McCormick¹⁶ moved to Ohio and at once organized a class, appealing for aid to Kentucky Methodists. Asbury answered his appeal by sending John Kobler¹⁷ to form a circuit. Kobler came in 1798 and was the first of the circuit riders to come to Ohio, the others being local preachers. The first Methodist Episcopal church¹⁸ in the Northwest Territory was built two years later, on the Scioto Brush Creek, about nine miles from Rome in Adams County, Ohio. In 1803 the Ohio¹⁹ district was

10. Ibid., pages 358, 364. McTyre, Holland N. pages 438, 439. Redford, A. H. "History of Methodism in Kentucky." Vol. I. page 24.

11. Stevens, Abel Vol. II. page 364.

12. Ibid., page 368.

13. Ibid., page 371.

14. Williams, Samuel W. "Pictures of Early Methodism in Ohio." pages 37, 38. Barker, John Marshall "History of Ohio Methodism." page 82.

15. Williams, Samuel W. "Pictures of Early Ohio Methodism." pages 38, 39.

16. Barker, John Marshall "History of Ohio Methodism." pages 84-87.

17. Ibid., page 117. Williams, page 44.

18. Williams, page 45.

19. Ibid., page 44.

formed. The next year Joseph Oglesby²⁰ made Cincinnati a regular preaching point on the Miami Circuit, and reorganized an existing class. In 1806-07 the first church²¹ was built in Cincinnati. In 1813 the first class was organized in Columbus²² and in 1818 Methodism entered Cleveland.²³

Very shortly after Methodism entered Ohio, its beginning in Illinois was made. As early as 1785 a layman, Captain Joseph Ogle,²⁴ moved to Illinois. Around him were gathered the classes of the local preachers. Joseph Lillard²⁵ was the first local preacher to come to Illinois, coming in 1793 and forming the first class. As the years passed other Methodists came, among these Hosea Rigg, who came and settled in the country. Local preachers cared for the work until 1803 when Hosea Rigg²⁶ went to Kentucky to consult the church authorities. He was himself ordained a local preacher, and in answer to his appeal the Western Conference, then in session at Mt. Gerezim, Kentucky, appointed Benjamin Young,²⁷ missionary to the Illinois Mission. Jesse Walker²⁸ was appointed in 1806 and with his coming Methodism found a strong leader and began in earnest to spread over the entire country. The settlements were mostly in the southwestern part of the state along the Mississippi river and it was not for twenty-five years that Methodism reached the little community afterwards to grow into the great city of Chicago.²⁹

Peter Cartwright,³⁰ traveling the Kentucky Circuit, in 1804 crossed over the Ohio river and preached at the homes of two Indiana settlers, thus introducing Methodism and forming the

20. Barker, page 338.

21. Williams, page 49.

22. Barker, John Marshall "History of Ohio Methodism," page 356.

23. Ibid., page 346.

24. Annals of the West. Compiler First Edition, J. H. Perkins. Revised and enlarged, J. M. Peck. See third chapter of this paper, Pioneer Methodism Reaches Pioneer Illinois.

25. Leaton, James "History of Methodism in Illinois," pages 29, 30.

26. Ibid., pages 32, 33.

27. Ibid., pages 34-37.

28. Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Vol. I. page 119. An evident disagreement of one year, due to the fact that "minutes" of the Western Conference were not printed until the next year.

29. Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Vol. I. page 148.

30. Cartwright, Peter "Autobiography," page 30.

first class in Indiana. A year later Hugh Cull,³¹ a local preacher, settled in the White Water country. Within two years the White Water Circuit³² was formed. It appeared in the minutes for 1808 and reported one hundred sixty-six members. It included all the country from the Ohio river north along the eastern line of the territory as far as where Richmond now stands. The work was a part of the Ohio District of the Western Conference. In 1809 the Indiana District³³ was formed with five circuits in Indiana. It included the work in the territory now Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri.

The work began in Michigan shortly after it had begun in Illinois. The approach to Michigan was by the way of Canada. The first form of the work was made up of visits from nearby preachers. In 1803 or 1804 a local preacher³⁴ by the name of Freeman preached at Detroit. Where he came from or where he went is not known. Nathan Bangs³⁵ preached there three times in 1804, but finding the people uninterested ceased coming. The New York Conference appointed William Case³⁶ to Detroit as a missionary in 1809. He labored there a year with little results. The following year two men came,³⁷ one from the New York Conference, Ninian Holmes, and one from the Western Conference, William Mitchell. During the period of the War of 1812 no ministers were sent, and what had been accomplished was largely lost. In 1815 the Genessee Conference³⁸ sent Joseph Hickox who continued on the circuit two years. In 1820 the work was transferred to the Ohio Conference. With the coming of Alfred Brunson in 1822 a new era began for Michigan Methodism.

The introduction of Methodism within the bounds of the present state of Wisconsin was probably performed by the

31. Holliday, F. C. "Indiana Methodism," page 85.

32. Ibid., page 86.

33. Minutes, Vol. I, page 182.

34. Stevens, Abel "History of the Methodist Episcopal Church," Vol. IV, page 154. Pilcher, Elijah H. "History of Protestantism in Michigan," page 11.

35. Stevens, Vol. IV, page 154. Pilcher, page 12.

36. Stevens, Vol. IV, page 154. Pilcher, page 14.

37. Stevens, Vol. IV, page 154. Pilcher, page 17.

38. Pilcher, page 56.

39. Ibid., page 60.

Methodist preacher⁴⁰ from Galena, Illinois in 1828. John T. Mitchell,⁴¹ who was appointed to Galena, began to do organized work in Wisconsin in 1832. In the same year John Clark arrived⁴² at Green Bay as Indian Missionary from the New York Conference. With these two fields occupied the work began. The next year Mitchell built a log meeting house. In 1835 Alfred Brunson was in charge of the Galena District⁴³ and Milwaukee was included in the list of appointments for this year. A year later the work⁴⁴ was divided between the Illinois and Michigan Conferences, and in 1840 was made a part of the Rock River Conference. When Methodism had been introduced into Wisconsin it had been established in all sections of the great Northwest. From these small beginnings the church was soon to spread to all parts.

The western march of settlement is an achievement the United States may well be proud of. No other nation was so situated as to have settled, civilized, and governed, so vast a territory. In this great achievement Methodism played an important part. No other church could have carried the gospel, with its wholesome influence, to the distant settlers so widely scattered. In this westward movement the local preacher no less than the circuit rider, is of vital importance. Across the mountains, through the wilderness of Kentucky north into Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, or crossing the Mississippi he struggled on. He was sent by no one but was urged on sometimes by his evangelistic zeal, sometimes by a desire to secure a home and lands in the west, and sometimes by the call of the wunderlust, or by a combination of these interests. He is deserving of unstinted praise. It is interesting to note that before John Wesley had been dead fifteen years one of the local preachers, the vanguard of a noble army, had crossed the Mississippi and had preached, in the territory of Catholic Spain (now the state of Missouri) the first Protestant sermon.⁴⁵

40. Bennett, P. S. and Lamson, James, "History of Methodism in Wisconsin," pages 20, 21.

41. *Ibid.*, page 21.

42. *Ibid.*, pages 13, 21.

43. *Ibid.*, page 26.

44. *Ibid.*, page 27.

45. John Clark. See chapter three of this paper, *Pioneer Methodism Reaches Pioneer Illinois*.

CHAPTER TWO

PIONEER ILLINOIS IN RELATION TO METHODISM

An adequate understanding of Methodism's advance in Illinois requires a knowledge of the outstanding events and factors in the history of Illinois. Such events and factors are comprehended best in the light of the nation and especially of the Northwest.

When the first Methodist preacher reached Illinois, George Washington was president. When the first of the circuit riders came, Jefferson was serving his first term. Throughout this period the French Revolution and then the Napoleonic Wars engaged the attention of the world. The United States was ever in danger of being drawn into the conflict, and finally in 1812 declared war upon Great Britain. Only the latter event affected the West to any great extent. The War of 1812 increased the Indian troubles of the people of Illinois, and the scattered settlements¹ were engaged in a struggle for existence.

The affairs of the Northwest are of more importance to Illinois. Illinois and the Northwest had first been French territory. When the British conquered the French in the Seven Years War this vast region with the other French territory was ceded to Great Britain. From this time until the Revolutionary War the latter governed Illinois. The daring and skill of George Rogers Clark placed the control of this territory in the hands of Virginia. Kaskaskia and Cahokia in southwestern Illinois were captured by him.

This expedition of Clark's is of two-fold importance. It first of all gave the Americans the possession of the Northwest, which the American commissioners secured at the treaty of Paris (1783). In the second place the soldiers of Clark not only carried back glowing reports of the country but many of them returned as settlers.²

1. Governor Reynolds in his fifth chapter "Illinois Under the North-western Territorial Government" in his "Pioneer History of Illinois" does not deal with this directly, but reflects very much of the trouble. See also, Pooley, William Vipond, "The Settlement of Illinois, from 1830 to 1850," page 31.

2. Reynolds, "Pioneer History of Illinois," page 260. Boggess, Arthur Clinton "The Settlement of Illinois 1778-1830," page 91. Pooley, William Vipond "The Settlement of Illinois, from 1830 to 1850," page 30.

Virginia and the other states ceded their claims to the Northwest and it was made national domain by the Ordinance³ of 1787, which was passed by the Continental Congress, before the ratification of the Constitution. This ordinance forbade slavery, gave freedom of worship, and encouraged education.⁴ From this date until 1800 Illinois⁵ was governed by the national government as a part of the Northwest Territory. Following this for nine years it was a part of the Indiana Territory and from 1809 to 1818 it formed the Illinois Territory.

The two great movements of the day, that affected Illinois, were the westward march of the settlers and the conquest of the Indians. When the Revolution broke out the Americans had only begun to settle in the Alleghany Mountains and to push beyond. "It had taken them over a century and a half to spread from the Atlantic to the Alleghanies. In the next three-quarters of a century they spread from the Alleghanies to the Pacific."⁶ Slowly at first, and then in great numbers the emigrants came through the mountains into the land beyond. Kentucky and Tennessee were the first to be settled. The former was admitted to the union in 1792 and the latter in 1796. At this time there were but few Americans in Illinois. The census report for 1800 gives a good comparison of the sections of the West.⁷

Kentucky	220,955
Ohio	45,356
Indiana	2,517
Illinois	2,358

Ohio was admitted as a state in 1803.

There were many hindrances to settlement.⁸ Chief among these were the Indians who were urged to oppose the Ameri-

3. See note 2 page 2 of this paper.

4. Channing, Edward "A History of the United States," Vol. III, page 544.

5. I have used Davidson and Stuve, "History of Illinois," for the early history of Illinois, also Gov. Reynold's, "Pioneer History of Illinois," comparing these with others. I have used the term Illinois as applying to the territory now within the state of Illinois, and the term Northwest as applying to the territory within the Northwest Territory.

6. Roosevelt, Theodore "The Winning of the West." Vol. I, page 34.

7. Return of the whole number of persons within the several districts of the United States, according to the Census Act of 1800. Published 1802, Washington William Duane and Son. Boggess, page 91.

8. Boggess, pages 90-98. A chapter on "Obstacles to Immigration." Channing, Vol. III. pages 530, 531.

cans by the British, the land policy of the United States government which made it difficult for settlers to buy lands, and the remoteness of the territory from the eastern states. In addition to these there were other obstacles, the lack of a market, the retention of the Western posts by the British, the unoccupied lands in Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky which were more accessible to the emigrant, and the difficulties of emigrating. Sometimes the future looked dark but the Americans overcame all difficulties.

The defeat of the Indians by Wayne at the battle of the Fallen Timbers⁹ in 1794 did much to encourage the settlers and to intimidate the Indians. For a time there was peace. But the bands of marauding young braves never ceased their raids. Roosevelt's statement is significant, "The Indians have shrunk back before our advance only after fierce and dogged resistance."¹⁰ There were periods of comparative quiet. After the War of 1812 the more thickly settled regions were scarcely ever troubled. But Illinois was never free from Indian attack until after the Black Hawk War of 1831-32. The periods of calm were sufficient to induce the coming of the emigrants. The successive Indian Treaties by which millions of acres of the northwest were ceded by the Indians were an important factor in the settlement of Illinois.¹¹

The land question was not settled in Illinois until it had held back emigration for a good many years. Early settlers had been granted lands,¹² as pay for militia service, and for improving and cultivating the land. Land offices¹³ were opened in Illinois, after years of delay, in 1814. Some twelve thousand people had already come to Illinois before this. The pre-emption act of 1813 did much to secure the pioneers in their lands.¹⁴ From this time the land question ceased to give much trouble and emigration increased rapidly.

9. Roosevelt, Vol. IV, page 110.

10. Ibid., Vol. I, page 32.

11. Boggess, pages 79-82. McMasters, John Bach "A History of the People of the United States," Vol. III, pages 459, 529.

12. American State Papers, Public Lands. (Duff, Green Edition) Vol. II, pages 135-147, 189-205.

13. Boggess, page 81.

14. Davidson and Stuve "History of Illinois," page 291.

Roads were improved and travel down the Ohio river became more safe. Emigrants became so numerous that they were able to protect themselves. As the settlers pushed westward, Illinois ceased to be so remote. The British finally gave up the western posts, but not until after the War of 1812 did their hostile influence upon the Indians cease.

When Illinois was admitted as a state it was supposed to have a population of forty thousand, but since the census was taken over a period extending from April to December and since travelers were counted as they passed through the several counties, it is impossible to accept this census as trustworthy.¹⁵ The forty thousand were necessary to statehood and the people were determined to achieve it. The earliest settlements were in the southwestern part of Illinois, but in 1818 extended half way up the state. By 1820 the population numbered fifty-five thousand. It was evident that the pioneer period was coming to an end. The obstacles to settlement had been conquered.

Pioneer life in Illinois as in the rest of the west is both attractive and repulsive. The strong, rugged, honest, manly virtues are very admirable, while the lack of culture and education, the tendency to revert to barbarous customs, and the lack of religious life excites one's opposition. "All qualities, good and bad, are intensified and accentuated in the life in the wilderness."¹⁶ In the matter of the early camp meeting this is brought out quite clearly. Almost all the population attended either to break it up or to be a part of it, while those who supported it were as ready for a fight as the rowdies.

The first of the American settlers¹⁷ to come to Illinois were of the class of hunters, and hunter-farmers, men who lived largely by means of the rifle, but who cut down or killed a few trees and tilled small patches of ground. Professor Pooley¹⁸ characterizes them clearly, "The descendents of the frontiers-

15. Boggess, pages 116, 117, 187. Pooley, page 34.

16. Roosevelt, Vol. I, pages 54, 55.

17. Roosevelt, Vol. III, pages 299-302. Roosevelt describes at length the various types of western frontiersmen.

18. "Settlement of Illinois 1830-1850." page 29. Compare with Roosevelt, Vol. III, page 296.

men who had chopped the first trails across the Alleghanies and who first wandered through the lonely western wilderness and built the small stockaded hamlets of Kentucky and Tennessee, impelled by the same restlessness which carried their fathers toward the West now moved across the Ohio to continue the struggle with wild nature and wilder redmen, for possession of the territory which today constitutes the state of Illinois." This class of men generally passed westward with the passing of the frontier.

Soon these men were followed by a more industrious class of men, adventurous, but more thrifty. They came to secure the land, which they handed down to their children. They built permanent homes, tilled the land, aided in the erection of the early schools and churches. This class soon formed the bulk of the population.

After them came the more wealthy men from the east. These were the men of means, the young lawyers and merchants, raised and educated in the east, but lured by the opportunities of the west. They were comparatively few in numbers, but from them came many of the leaders and politicians of the period. They built large roomy houses and gave some tone and culture to the rough settlements.

The early settlers in Illinois were largely from Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia.¹⁹ Some came from the South Atlantic States where cotton culture and slavery were pushing them out. New Englanders²⁰ were seldom found in the west in these early days, for they found suitable lands in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York. Early society in Illinois lacked the "Yankee" element.

To give an adequate picture of western life is here impossible, but the moral and religious elements can be described briefly. In such rough frontier settlements there was "much loosening of the bands, social, political, moral, and religious."²¹ Readjustments under the new conditions caused many of the

19. Letter of Alvin Stone, a young Baptist Missionary, in the Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society. Vol. III, No. 4 page 89.

20. Roosevelt, Vol. III, page 337.

21. Roosevelt, Vol. III, page 101.

old restraints to be given up, before the new ones were accepted. Drunkenness was very common, but Governor John Reynolds says that the higher crimes were of rare occurrence.²² But very early there came into the settlements those who maintained moral and religious standards. Men of the type of the Lemens, Ogles, Governor Bond, James Piggot and the Reynolds, did much for the pioneers. The early religious services²³ of the pioneers, when they were without ministers and representatives of the church are indicative of the type of men who played important parts in early Illinois.

In the observance of the Sabbath we may find an interesting characterization of the Illinois frontiersmen. Governor Reynolds notes²⁴ the observance of the early Sabbaths. He wrote, "In early times, in many settlements of Illinois, Sunday was observed by the Americans only as a day of rest from work. They generally were employed in hunting, fishing, getting up their stock, hunting bees, breaking young horses, shooting at marks, horse and foot racing and the like." John Mason Peck²⁵ in Reynold's Pioneer History speaks of the same custom. "There was a class of Americans, who paid no regard to the Sabbath, but engaged in sport and pastime, drank intoxicating liquors, used profane language, and were careless of moral duties, and the fear of the Lord." The early services of the pioneers prove that Roosevelt was right in his description of the frontiersmen as far as Illinois is concerned, when he said,²⁶ "At the bottom they were deeply religious in their tendencies, and though ministers and meeting-houses were rare, yet the backwoods cabin often contained Bibles, and the mothers used to instil into the minds of their children reverence for Sunday, while many even of the hunters refused to hunt on that day."

The West was generally misunderstood by travelers. An interesting letter of protest is found in the New York Christian

22. "My Own Times." page 79.
the First Contact.

23. See Chapter on Pioneer Methodism Reaches Pioneer Illinois, the section on

24. "My Own Times." page 80.

25. Reynolds, John "Pioneer History of Illinois," page 260. This particular chapter was written by Reverend Peck, a Baptist minister who came to Illinois in 1817. (see page 346)

26. Roosevelt. Vol. I. page 156.

Advocate²⁷ of June 14, 1833. The writer, John Scripps, a Methodist preacher, complains that travelers, missionaries, and easterners call the west immoral, irreligious, and ignorant. He insists that they do not understand the West or the people of the West, that some do this because they wish to excite the sympathies and the contributions of the easterners, and that some are just out of college and know more of books than men.

Morris Birkbeck, an Englishman who founded a colony in Illinois, gives an interesting account of the religious customs of the time. He speaks²⁸ of the court house as being used by all persuasions, as a place of worship, and that "any acknowledged preacher who announces himself for a Sunday or other day may always collect an audience and rave or reason as he sees meet." Few Sundays pass without something of the kind. Christmas is a day of relaxation and amusement and but few observe it religiously. "Children are not baptized.*** There is no consecrated burial place, or funeral service. The body is enclosed in the plainest coffin; the family of the deceased convey the corpse into the woods; some of the party are provided with axes, and some with spades; a grave is prepared, and the body quietly placed in it; then trees are felled, and laid over the grave to protect it from the wild beasts. If the party belong to a religious community preaching sometimes follows; if not a few natural tears are shed in silence, and the scene is closed.***Marriages are observed as occasions of festivity."

It was the day of the log cabins and the log meeting-houses. It would be a great mistake to fail to see the sterling quality of the men of the frontier or to think they were not religious or moral. The coming of the preachers brought stability and reinforcement to the good elements of the little villages. These early preachers were as hardy, rough, uncouth, as the men they labored with. They lived, in the main, the same life, suffered the same hardships and losses, as the other pioneers. Above all they were men, and they engaged in a worthy service, the bringing of the gospel to their fellow frontiersmen.

27. New York Christian Advocate. Vol. V. page 165.

28. Birkbeck, Morris "Letters from Illinois," pages 23-25. I give an abridged form of part of the letter.

As life on the frontier advanced and became more cultured, log school-houses and meeting-houses were erected. Better educated people including the same class of preachers came to the country. For a time there was friction²⁹ between the earlier, more ignorant settlers and preachers and their better trained brothers, but all learned to live side by side and life was varied enough for all to be of service.

Methodism deserves especial credit for its ministry to the frontier. Its system of the itineracy made possible the reaching of the far distant and scattered settlements, and its rugged preachers followed persistently wherever the pioneer went. Its creed was acceptable to the rough individualistic settler. "Calvinism,³⁰ though more congenial to them than Episcopacy, and infinitely more so than Catholicism, was too cold for the fiery hearts of the borderers; they were not stirred to the depths of their natures till other creeds, and above all, Methodism, worked their way to the wilderness." In the many publications of John Mason Peck,³¹ Methodism is always credited with the largest number of adherents of any faith in Illinois. It is quite true that the typical faith of the frontier was the Methodist, and it played a great part in the pioneer days of Illinois.

29. Gerhard, Fred "Illinois As It Is." pages 65, 66. Ford, Thomas "History of Illinois." pages 92, 93.

30. Roosevelt, Vol. I. page 157.

31. A Gazetteer of Illinois. (1834) page 89. New Gazetteer of Illinois. (1837) page 72.

CHAPTER THREE

PIONEER METHODISM REACHES PIONEER ILLINOIS

I. *The First Contact: The Settlers and the Local Preachers.*

Methodism approached Illinois in much the same way as did the early pioneers. First came the local preacher, like the hunter; then came the local preachers who settled and lived in the country, like the hunter-settlers, who often advanced as the frontier advanced; and finally came the regular appointed ministers, sent by the church, who organized circuits and societies in the new territory, who were like the permanent settlers of the west. However, such a comparison is concerned only with the coming of the ministers.

When the first minister reached Illinois he found among the settlers those who favored the Methodist church. Captain Ogle,¹ William Murray, and Peter Casterline were among the early settlers² who became Methodists. Around Ogle was formed the first Methodist society in Illinois. Joseph Lillard,³ a local preacher from Kentucky, was the first minister of the Methodist faith to come to Illinois.

However, his coming was merely a visit. This pioneer soldier of the cross stayed only long enough to form a church or class, appoint Joseph Ogle leader, and preach a few times. This organization was the first Methodist church in the territory that became the state of Illinois, and Lillard was preceded by only the French Catholic priests and a Separate Baptist preacher.⁴

1. Perkins, James H. "Annals of the West." Second Edition revised and enlarged by John Mason Peck. pages 185, 700. The revision of this work by Peck increases its value for this thesis because Peck was an Illinois man and was well informed on matters relating to Illinois.

2. Reynolds, John "The Pioneer History of Illinois." page 260. The chapter in which this reference is found was written by John Mason Peck, a Baptist minister, who came to Illinois in 1817. He wrote several works on early Illinois.

3. Ibid., page 186.

4. James Smith, who first visited Illinois in 1790. Perkins, James H. "Annals of the West." Second Edition. page 706.

At a time when there were no ministers in the settlements of Illinois the early pioneers held their own services. None of the inhabitants of the country were then communicants of any church, excepting the French Catholics and one lady, so that it is probable that these meetings were held previous to the coming of the ministers. Although there were no church members, many of the settlers "had been trained up by moral and religious parents or guardians, taught to regard the Sabbath as a day of worship and the propriety of doing justly and being merciful to their fellow-men and keeping the commandments of the Lord."⁵ These meetings were held at the cabins of the different participants, and were led in turn by Shadrach Bond, who became the first governor of the state, James Piggot, a captain of the early militia, and James Lemen, Sr., a prominent pioneer, who became one of the leading Baptist laymen. These leaders "read the scriptures, especially the Psalms, and sermons from books and sung hymns. No prayers were offered." It is interesting to note that the author of these remarks, John Mason Peck, a Baptist minister of considerable standing in the early communities, makes this additional statement: "In this way, order and good morals were preserved in the settlements."

It would be a mistake to suppose that this type of men included all the inhabitants of this territory. Peck goes on to say, "There was a class of Americans who paid no regard to the Sabbath, but engaged in sport and pastime, drank intoxicating liquors, used profane language, and were careless of moral duties and the fear of the Lord."⁶

While Joseph Ogle and his few companions who joined the Methodist society gave stability to the organization, yet the visit of Joseph Lillard had but little permanent value. Without doubt much good resulted from his preaching and the organization of the class. But the class afterwards became disorganized and had to be reformed by later preachers.

With the coming of the local preachers who settled in the territory, there came an element of more importance. These men were ordinary settlers who made their living through the

5. The quotations of this paragraph are found in Reynolds Pioneer History, page 256. See note 2.

6. Reynolds, "Pioneer History." page 256.

week like other men. On Sundays and other suitable occasions they preached to the people of the various settlements, and did what they could for the advancement of religion. Later when the circuit rider came the societies and classes were organized about these men. When assistance was needed on the circuit, at the camp meeting, or when there were more circuits than ministers in a certain section, these local preachers stepped to the front. Almost without exception these early local preachers who accompanied or were parts of the early bands of settlers were the founders of Methodism in the frontier communities. Methodism could never have kept up with the western march of the settlers without the aid of such men.

Illinois had its share of these local preachers. Hosea Rigg⁷ moved to Illinois in 1796 and settled in the American Bottom in St. Clair county. He reorganized the class which Lillard had formed and again placed it under Mr. Ogle's leadership. He later organized another class in what is now Madison county in the Goshen settlement, between Edwardsville and the American Bottom. John Clark⁸ came to Illinois in 1797 after a varied career, in which he had heard Wesley preach and had conversed with him. It is interesting to know that this man was the first to carry Methodism and Protestantism across the Mississippi river. William Scott⁹ and John Kirkpatrick¹⁰ were among the number of the earliest local preachers, coming in 1797 and 1802 respectively.

II. *The Coming of the Circuit Riders.*

The first regular appointed minister who came to Illinois from the Methodist church was Benjamin Young.¹¹ He was sent by the Western Conference from its session in 1803 and his work was called the "Illinois Mission."¹² At the end of the year he reported sixty-seven members of the church in the ter-

7. Reynolds, John "My Own Times," page 186.

8. Reynolds, John "The Pioneer History of Illinois," page 264. Peck, John Mason "Father Clark; The Pioneer Preacher."

9. Reynolds, John "The Pioneer History of Illinois," pages 205-207.

10. Leaton, James "History of Methodism in Illinois," pages 38, 39.

11. Reynolds, John "The Pioneer History of Illinois," pages 260, 219. Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Vol. I, pages 119, 125, 129. Stevens, Abel "History of the Methodist Episcopal Church." Vol. IV, pages 153, 154.

12. Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. I, pages 148, 159, 209, 243.

ritory of Illinois. From now on there was a regular succession of circuit riders who followed Young. Jesse Walker was the circuit rider sent to Illinois in 1806. He was one of the ablest of the early itinerants, and with his coming the church was sure to prosper. He increased the membership on this circuit to two hundred twenty. Five years later this same circuit reported four hundred eleven members. In 1813, which was the last year that it included all the work in Illinois, there were four hundred thirty-six members.

The coming of the circuit rider is very important because it represents the vital connection of the new country with the conference organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The work might not have prospered at once (although it did), but once the circuit riders had entered a field they were not to be defeated or shut out. The regular succession of ministers increased from one to two and three, or as many as the field required, until today Illinois Methodism is made up of four conferences of hundreds of ministers.

III. *The Circuit Riders and Their Circuits.*

Theodore Roosevelt¹³ has paid high tribute to these early warriors of the cross. "In the hard and cruel life of the border, with its grim struggle against the forbidding forces of wild nature and wilder men, there was much to pull the frontiersman down. If left to himself, without moral guidance, without any of the influences that tend toward the uplifting of man and the subduing of the brute within him, sad would have been his, and therefore our, fate. From this fate we have been largely rescued by the fact that together with the rest of the pioneers went the pioneer preachers; and all honor be given to the Methodists for the great proportion of these pioneer preachers whom they furnished.***It is easy for those who stay at home in comfort, who never have to see humanity in the raw or to strive against the dreadful naked forces which appear clothed, hidden and subdued in civilized life—it is easy for such to criticize the men who in rough fashion and amid grim surroundings, make ready the way for the higher life that is to

13. Roosevelt, Theodore "John Wesley and American Methodism," a speech delivered February 28, 1903, in New York. *Northwestern Christian Advocate*, March 4, 1903, page 1.

come afterward.***These pioneers of Methodism had the strong, militant virtues which go to the accomplishment of such great deeds. Now and then they betrayed the shortcomings natural to men of their type, but their shortcomings seem small indeed when we place beside them the magnitude of the work they achieved."

In his "Winning of the West,"¹⁴ Roosevelt again dwells on the frontier preacher. "The whole West owes an immense debt to the hard working frontier preachers, sometimes Presbyterian, generally Methodist or Baptist, who so gladly gave their lives to their labors and who struggled with such fiery zeal for the moral well-being of the communities to which they penetrated. Wherever there was a group of log cabins, thither some Methodist circuit rider made his way or there some Baptist preacher took up his abode. Their prejudices and narrow dislikes, their raw vanity and sullen distrust of all who were better schooled than they count for little when weighed against their intense earnestness and heroic self-sacrifice. They proved their truth by their endeavor. They yielded scores of martyrs, nameless and unknown men who perished at the hands of the savages, or by sickness or in flood and storm. They had to face no little danger from the white inhabitants themselves. In some of the communities most of the men might heartily support them, but in others where the vicious and lawless element were in control, they were in constant danger of mobs. The godless and lawless people hated the religious with a bitter hatred, and gathered in great crowds to break up their meetings. On the other hand, those who had experienced religion were no believers in the doctrine of non-resistance at the core. They were thoroughly healthy men and they fought as valiently against the powers of evil in matters physical as in matters moral. Some of the successful frontier preachers were men of weak frame, whose intensity of conviction and fervor of religious beliefs supplied the lack of bodily powers, but as a rule the preacher who did most was a stalwart man as strong in body as in faith. One of the continually recurring incidents in the biographies of the famous frontier preachers is that of some particularly hardened sinner who was never converted

14. Roosevelt, Theodore "Winning of the West," Vol. IV, pages 285, 286.

until, tempted to assault the preacher of the word, he was soundly thrashed by the latter and his eyes thereby rudely opened through his sense of physical shortcoming to an appreciation of his moral iniquity."

These quotations give a good picture of the kind of men these early itinerants were, and a good estimate of the value of their work.

The itineracy was an institution that was easily adapted to the work in the frontier communities. This system made possible the inclusion into one circuit of many small societies scattered over a territory so large that the preacher must ride often over a hundred miles to reach them. This man was then enabled to minister to a score of small communities that would otherwise be without a minister. It made possible the continued existence of small societies or churches that would otherwise have quickly passed out of existence. But the thing that made this institution so important to frontier life was the ease with which new communities were added to the circuits of the ministers. Every man was expected to enlarge his circuit so that it would require two ministers or so that it would have to be divided into two or more circuits. Often a man was sent into new territory to form a circuit and his work would then be called a "mission" until it became partially self-supporting and then it was termed a circuit. Ezra Squier Tipple in his work on Francis Asbury speaks of Methodism and its growing field: "Its preachers were all missionaries. Every one of them 'was an extensionist' enlarging his field of operation in every possible direction, opening a new preaching place at this point and that, his circuit in this manner growing steadily until it had to be divided. Thus in circuit, and district, and State, American Methodism won ever-widening triumph year after year."¹⁵ Another matter of importance to the frontier was the fact that circuits were not allowed to go uncared for. Every circuit had its minister or was combined with another circuit and the one man or two as the case might be looked after all the societies. The system made possible the use of certain strong men, who were especially successful in frontier work, in building up first

15. Tipple, Ezra Squier "Francis Asbury, the Prophet of the Long Road." page 191.

one circuit after another, or in introducing Methodism into first one locality or another. A man was seldom permitted to remain two years in succession on a circuit. Strong men were hurled from one difficult job to another, and as a circuit varied in its combined life various types of men were sent from year to year.

A short examination of a proposed plan for an Illinois circuit for the year 1829 will give an idea of how their circuits were managed and organized.¹⁶ (See the following page for plan.)

In the first two columns we find the days and dates. The third gives the names of the different appointments, where Benson preached. It will be noticed that most of these are homes of the members, that on October 20th he preached in the Concord Meeting-House and on the 31st at the Camp Ground Meeting-House. It is possible that the appointments for the 24th and 29th were meeting-houses, but this is merely conjecture.¹⁷ He gave himself four days of rest. The fourth column enumerates the members. It is interesting to note the small numbers in the classes, the largest being seventy members, and the smallest five members, while the average is only twenty-three. The total membership of the seventeen classes was three hundred and ninety-three. This formed one society. The next column of figures represents the distance from one charge to another, the total distance being one hundred and twenty-three miles. In this the circuit was probably not larger than the average of the early day, probably for 1829 it represented a larger circuit. After this Benson lists the class leaders, the preachers, exhorters, and stewards. The class leader had charge of the class in each locality. The preachers

16. It is impossible to submit absolute proof that this plan was used. I found the plan in the Methodist safe in the State Historical Library at Springfield, Illinois. Part of the writing has faded. It was among a large number of papers which were the records of the early church trials in Illinois. John H. Benson served the Mount Vernon circuit in 1829 according to the Minutes. I cannot find anything more to support the plan. It is, however, in agreement with other descriptions of other circuits and is chosen because it pictures quickly and more vividly the nature of these circuits than the other written accounts. For others see *Northwestern Christian Advocate*, August 28, 1867, page 278, article by Reverend John Stewart; and the many lives and autobiographies of the frontier preacher.

17. The initials "S. M." and "L. M." with the word "House" following led me to think they might refer to S. Meeting-House and L. Meeting-House. The larger societies are at these points and the Concord Meeting-House.

Preaching Days.	No.	Appointments.	No.	Dis- tance.	Leaders.	Preachers.	Exhorters.	Stewards.	Remarks.
Sun., Oct.	17	McLanebough	24		Otho Davenport	Jos. Erwin	Gana Hogg		Call upon Bro. Deets in town.
Mon.	18	Wm. Trammals	18	5					
Tues.	19	Whites	18	7	John Musgrove				
Wed.	20	Concord M. House	70	5	Isaac Hail	Thomas Cottingham			
Thur.	21	John Princes	28	4	John Prince	John Proctor		Elijah Kimby	Thomas Cottingham
Fri.	22	Thomas Gheema	21	12	1.	L. P. Proctor		Joseph Proctor	
Sat.	23	Peter Greets	5	6	Charles Henderson	Isaac Hail			New Appointment
Sun.	24	S. M. House	35	7	Eli Adams			Eli Adams	
Mon.	25	Rest							
Tues.	26	Joshua Boyoet	5	6					New Appointment
Wed.	27	John Kerwin	25	13	Thomas Russell				
Thur.	28	Richard Ratcliff	14	5	Richard Ratcliff	Elijah Livingston			
Fri.	29	L. M. House	52	12	John Roberts	Philip Corder	R. Ratcliff		
Sat.	30	George Whittles	19	6	Br. Webb	John Henderson	Lion Michal		
Sun.	31	Campground Meeting	12	3	Alexander McCrays	Wm. Burns		McClary	
Mon., Nov.	1	Rest				George Hanwick			
Tues.	2	John Whittington	12	9		Samuel Spect			
Wed.	3	John (name not plain)	35	20	B. Parish				Appoint a Leader
Thur.	4	Ride to M. L.							2.
Fri.	5	Rest							
Sat.	6	Rest							
		Members	393	123	3.				

JOHN H. BENSON, CONFERENCE YEAR, 1829.

1.— Name here not readable.

2.— The time will (the rest is not plain).

3.— Round the Circuit.

and exhorters represent lower degrees of the ministry, men who were unable to travel on the circuits, but who were called local elders, or deacons. They were not expected to travel. The exhorters were laymen who often spoke briefly at the meetings. The preachers, who were generally the local preachers, were often called upon for help. Often they preached at stated times between the rounds of the circuit riders. In the last column we may notice the remark that two of the places were new appointments. In all respects this plan gives a good view of the work of these pioneer itinerants.

The influence of the circuit riders was very great. They stayed all night and ate their meals at the homes of the people. Although they were often uneducated they found others who were less educated. In traveling about in new sections of the country every year they came in contact with vast numbers of people and became adept in handling and managing men. Their experience made them bigger men than many of the pioneers and entitled them to win respect. When they came into a community to preach people were always ready to listen and a congregation assembled at once.

Travelers from the eastern states or Europe who visited Illinois often spoke depreciatingly of these men, but as a general rule these travelers were not only out of touch with western life, but also seldom charged them with any more serious crime than lack of culture and learning, and an abundance of fanaticism. A fair example of this criticism is found in Eliza W. Farnham's "Life in the Prairie Land,"¹⁸ in which she says: "I have heard many of their 'Circuit Riders' and several of the settled clergy of the Methodist Church and am bound to say, that before I had this experience I should have considered any true description ironical and libelous." But such criticism can scarcely be accepted as of importance when one considers that these preachers came from among the settlers, had practically no opportunity for schooling and were of the same type as the rest of the western people. It is not at all to be desired that their shortcomings should be passed over. They were uneducated, uncultured, rough, narrow, bigoted, and fanatical. But

18. Published, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1860. The entire book seems unappreciative of Western life and institutions.

these very qualities made them the preachers for the people, while their virtues enabled them to prepare the way for a higher type of civilization.

The theology¹⁹ of these circuit riders is very interesting. They taught that all men were conceived and born in sin, and that they were very far from original righteousness. They proclaimed that Christ died for all, that redemption was free, that choice was the heritage of every man. All men were held responsible for their sins. The presence of God and his influence in men's lives were very real. Conversion was a literal right about face. Generally it was preceded by much anguish and followed by much rejoicing. A very noticeable change took place in the life of the convert. Along with their narrow condemnation of frills, ruffles, curls, jewelry and ornaments were higher virtues. They waged war on vice of every sort. They early condemned drunkenness and their stand on slavery was quite marked. Hell and the devil were firmly believed in and often preached about.

The significant feature of this theology was its democratic tendencies. Religion, choice, redemption were free to all. This fact won for it immediate acceptance in preference to predestination. The warmth of the Methodists increased its favor over the more reserved faiths. These facts with the aid of the system of the itinerancy and the free use of the camp meeting made Methodism the typical creed²⁰ of the West.

It is difficult to describe the hardships of these frontier preachers. The unsettled condition of the country, the presence of the Indians, the lack of roads, bridges and lodging houses made the work difficult. There was a decided prejudice against paying the ministers, at least paying them adequately. Money was scarce and much of their support was board and keep, clothes, sometimes a gift of a horse, with only a little money. Often they were not paid the little they were supposed to receive. It was almost impossible for a married man to travel the circuits. His wife and family were an added expense and

19. Ford, Governor Thomas "History of Illinois." pages 38, 39. Eddy, T. M. "Influence of Methodism Upon the Civilization and Education of the West." Methodist Quarterly Review. Vol. 17. pages 280-296.

20. Roosevelt, Theodore "Winning of the West." Vol. I. page 195. Vol. II. page 384.

people grumbled at this and urged him to locate, as they expressed it when one left the itinerancy and settled. The riotous and lawless element in western life forced the preachers to fight their way as they went. Many perished by the hands of the Indians, by storms, by floods, by beasts, by lawless men, and many were worn out by the strenuous life. The hardships of the early settlers were shared to the greatest extent by the frontier preacher.

In the following chapter the life of one of these early circuit riders will be briefly sketched. A mere description of these men does not give an adequate appreciation or conception of their work. Walker is chosen because he worked mainly in Illinois, because he was essentially of the early pioneer period, and because of his eminence which has not always been recognized.

CHAPTER FOUR

FATHER WALKER

ILLINOIS METHODISM'S MOST SIGNIFICANT PIONEER

Jesse Walker, known as Father Walker, is the typical pioneer circuit rider of the Methodist Church in Illinois. He built upon no other man's foundations but laid the foundations upon which hundreds of Methodist preachers are building today. Walker's life is of interest and gives a good picture of one of the most significant of the early circuit riders. Several have called him the Daniel Boone of the Methodist Church.¹

One naturally thinks of Peter Cartwright, James Axley, and many others when speaking of the greater of the early circuit riders. But it must be remembered that Cartwright does not belong exclusively to the pioneer period, that his labors extended into the last half of the nineteenth century,² and that he was not a pioneer in the sense that Walker was. James Axley³ has received much praise as one of the important sons of the west, but he belongs more to the west in general and less to Illinois in particular. He worked but little in this state, while Walker spent much of his time here.

Walker⁴ was born in Virginia in 1766 and like many other Virginians came west to the valley of the Mississippi. He had but few educational advantages and but little connection with the Methodist church until he was twenty years of age. Being converted at this age he was soon led into intimate association with the ministers, and accompanied them on their circuits.

1. Leaton, James "Methodism in Illinois," pages 62, 63. Field, A. D. "Worthies and Workers in the Rock River Conference," page 72.

2. Died September 25, 1872.

3. Stevens, Abel "History of the Methodist Episcopal Church." Vol. IV. pages 366-371.

4. For early life of Walker see Beggs, who knew Walker in his later years. Beggs, Stephen R. "History of the West and Northwest," pages 133-142. Part of this account is quoted from a Mms. written by Walker.

He was urged to become a Methodist circuit rider, but knowing the hardships of the life he hesitated because he did not wish to ask his delicately reared wife, who had been raised in a wealthy family, to share the hardships of the itineracy.

Walker's westward emigration brought him to the neighborhood of Nashville, Tennessee. By 1802, the year he was admitted to the Western Conference,⁵ he was thirty-six years old and had a family of four children. It was in this year that he yielded to the call to preach. For four years his ministerial work lay in the states of Kentucky and Tennessee.⁶ During his first year in the ministry he gave Peter Cartwright a license to exhort, which was Cartwright's first step towards the ministry.⁷

Charles Matheny, who preceded Walker on the Illinois Circuit in 1805, did not finish his work, and William McKendree, later bishop, but then the presiding elder of the Cumberland District in which the Illinois circuit was located, set out for Illinois, taking Walker with him. The latter was chosen to care for the new work in this new country. Together they crossed the wilderness between the settlements in Kentucky and the settlements in Illinois. When the new field was reached the plans for the coming year were made and the two went on about their work. At the following session of the Western Conference (1806) Walker was assigned to Illinois.⁸ It was an important year for Methodism in this state when this hardy pioneer began to work.

It would be interesting to know the places⁹ where this pioneer preached and the people who heard him, but little information has lived from this early day. It is recorded that he

5. The Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Vol. I. page 107.

6. Ibid., pages 111-139. Red River Circuit, 1802; Livingston, 1803; Livingston and Hartford Circuits, 1804; Hartford, 1805.

7. Cartwright, Peter "Autobiography, or the Backwoods Preacher." page 22.

8. The Minutes. Vol. I. page 148.

9. Scripps, John "Early Methodism in the Far West," Western Christian Advocate, December 31, 1842, page 145 says, "The Illinois circuit embraced the few scattering settlements then within the bounds of the present counties of Madison, St. Clair and Monroe." He later tells of being first to incorporate Kaskaskia in a Methodist circuit.

Ibid., January 13, 1843, page 153. In another article he tells of the cities being avoided "as places of too much dissipation for the gospel to obtain foothold."

Ibid., January 6, 1843, page 149.

held the first watch night meeting and the first camp meeting in the state. The settlers then in the country centered around the Goshen and Turkey Hill settlements near the Edwardsville of today, Cahokia, and Kaskaskia. His work practically all lay in the American Bottom.¹⁰ During this year the church at Shiloh¹¹ was built. At the end of the year Walker reported to the Western Conference a membership of two hundred twenty,¹² which represented a gain of one hundred per cent.

Of the next five years¹³ Walker labored in Missouri three, and in Illinois two. He served on the Missouri Circuit, on the Illinois Circuit, then created and served for two years the Cape Girardeau Circuit (in Missouri) and again served in Illinois.¹⁴

For the next seven years¹⁵ Walker was presiding elder four years on the Illinois District, and three years on the Missouri District. The formation of these districts to take the place of circuits shows how the work was progressing. The Illinois District, while Walker was presiding elder included work in Illinois, Indiana, and Missouri. The Missouri District, while he was presiding elder, included work in Arkansas.

In 1819 Walker was left without an appointment,¹⁶ and was assigned as conference missionary. This was the year after Illinois was admitted as a state, and the Missouri Conference included this new state, as well as the territory of Missouri. He was to go to the uncared for in the bounds of this conference, and to aid the other preachers. The work did not suit him, as he preferred being assigned to a special work, and he felt that the brethren were jealous of him and limited or handicapped the work he could have done in helping them. He

10. The American Bottom was a stretch of land averaging a width of five miles extending from opposite St. Louis to the mouth of the Kaskaskia river.

11. There is some dispute upon this point. I believe the majority of evidence points to 1807. See Centennial of Anniversary of the Founding of the First Methodist Episcopal Church in Illinois, at Shiloh. M. H. Chamberlain.

12. Minutes, Vol. I, page 159. Scripps, John "Early Methodism in the Far West." Western Christian Advocate. December 31, 1842, page 145. This includes thirty from a class in Missouri.

13. For these Assignments see Minutes Vol. I, pages 161, 171, 184, 198, 212.

14. Scripps, John "Early Methodism in the Far West." Western Christian Advocate, December 31, 1842, page 145 says, "Brother Walker's name is on the Minutes of 1812 for Illinois Circuit, but he supplied Brother Parker's place on the district."

15. Minutes, Vol. I, pages 230, 246, 261, 283, 297, 313, 332.

16. Minutes, Vol. I, page 347.

resolved in case he should again be assigned to this task to go either to the Indians or to the city of St. Louis¹⁷ in which Methodism had not at that time been permanently established. He was so assigned at the Conference of 1820,¹⁸ and chose to go to St. Louis. His work so prospered that by 1822 the Missouri Conference¹⁹ was held in that city. He was appointed to the station of St. Louis for the year 1821.²⁰ The following year he was listed as missionary without a station. From an article of John Scripps,²¹ who knew him, we may judge that he remained in St. Louis until 1823.

Father Walker was particularly directed to care for the Indians by the Conference of 1823.²² The record of the Conference does not specify the place, but Scripps says²³ that he believes he went to the Indians along the Illinois river, and as we find him assigned as "Missionary²⁴ to the settlements between the Illinois and the Mississippi rivers, and to the Indians in the vicinity of Fort Clark,"²⁵ for 1824, we may assume that it was practically the same field. The part of the State of Illinois between Peoria and Chicago was then occupied by bands of Indians. Galena, near the Mississippi river, Fort Clark, later Peoria, and a little settlement around Fort Dearborn, were the only white settlements. Some may be inclined to pass over these years in Walker's life as wasted, for it is easy to see that the mission as an attempt to convert the Indians was a failure. He was at this work²⁶ until 1828, when he was assigned to

17. "On our return (J. Walker and J. Scripps from General Conference) and during this journey in June 1820, he first conceived the idea of his St. Louis Mission." Again "Shortly after conference (fall of 1820) he commenced his operations in that place." Scripps, John "Early Methodism in the Far West." *Western Christian Advocate*, March 3, 1843, page 181.

18. *Minutes*, Vol. I, page 367.

19. Scripps, John "Early Methodism in the Far West." *Northwestern Christian Advocate*, March 3, 10, 1843, pages 181, 185.

20. *Minutes*, Vol. I, page 386.

21. Scripps, John "Early Methodism in the Far West." *Western Christian Advocate*, March 10, 1843, page 185.

22. *Minutes*, Vol. I, page 426. "Missionary-Jesse Walker, missionary to the Missouri Conference, whose attention is particularly directed to the Indians within the bounds of said Conference."

23. Scripps, John "Early Methodism in the Far West." *Western Christian Advocate*, March 10, 1843, page 184.

24. *Minutes*, Vol. I, page 454.

25. *Afterwards Peoria*.

26. *Minutes*, Vol. I, pages 483, 516, 549.

Peoria.²⁷ Scripps²⁸ says of the work, "This mission, I believe, failed, through the removal of the Indians west of the Mississippi; but the impression he (Walker) made upon their minds was such as doubtless would have resulted in the best consequences, (could he have been retained among them) is evident for the veneration they long bore and probably still bear for Father Walker, (as they called him), and their strict adherence to his precepts, (even among their hunting parties in the recesses of the forests), such as abstinence from spirituous liquors, avoiding profanity, and observing the Sabbath." It is of interest to note that these Potawatomes among whom he worked remained loyal to the whites during the Black Hawk War.²⁹ It would be too much to assert that this was due to Walker, for we find other influences at work that kept them loyal, but we may be sure that the work of Walker tended to keep them peaceable.

In the year 1825 two events of interest occurred. S. R. Beggs³⁰ tells us that Walker established the first Methodist class in Peoria. During this same year Walker made a trip to Chicago.³¹ It is altogether in accordance with the character of the early circuit rider and especially Walker to say that he preached while in Chicago. There is nothing to show that he did, but he would have been either sick or unable to gather five or six together if he did not. Such would be the first protestant sermon in Chicago. Field discusses this question and gives all the information to be found. In 1830 Walker³² was appointed to the Chicago Mission. That he preached in Chicago is certain. Beggs³³ gives himself the honor of forming the first society when in Chicago in 1831 with Walker, at which time

27. Ibid., Vol. II, page 10.

28. Scripps, John "Early Methodism in the Far West," *Western Christian Advocate*, March 10, 1843, page 184.

29. Pease, Theodore Calvin "The Frontier State." *Centennial History of Illinois*, Vol. 2.

30. Beggs Stephen R. "West and Northwest," page 131.

31. Field, A. D. "Worthies and Workers of the Rock River Conference," pages 94-96.

32. Minutes, Vol. II, page 85.

33. Beggs, Stephen R. "West and Northwest," page 86. I do not mean to question Beggs' veracity, but to insist that the honor go to Walker where it belongs. Beggs would not have been in Chicago had it not been for Walker, and what is of more importance, it was Walker who pioneered all the work from Peoria north to Chicago.

Walker asked him to preach. Beggs³⁴ was assigned to this mission in the fall and was succeeded by Walker³⁵ in 1832. That Beggs formed the first class cannot be denied but it is also evident that it was Walker who first carried Methodism to Chicago and who gave the former the opportunity to open the doors of the church.

Walker was made superintendent in 1831 of the Mission District,³⁶ which included the Chicago Mission. This year Walker was not only superintendent of the district but also served the Desplain Mission.³⁷ The following year he was assigned to Chicago and was again superintendent of the Chicago District.³⁸ In 1833 he was permitted to give all of his time to the Chicago church. After this year of work the old pioneer was superannuated. He lived on his farm near Des Plaines, and did what he could to aid the church.³⁹ In 1835, while his conference was in session, the worn warrior passed away. It is of interest to note that with McKendree he first came to Illinois, and that he was closely associated with him during the early times, and that the two died the same year.

One of the last official acts of Walker's while yet connected with the Chicago church was the building of the first Methodist Church⁴⁰ building⁴¹ in Chicago. The building was erected in the year 1833 on the corner of North Water and Clark Streets, where it remained until 1838, when it was moved further south.

Walker must have enjoyed considerable influence in Chicago from 1830 until his death. In the records⁴² of Peoria

34. Beggs, page 86. Minutes. Vol. II. page 128.

35. Beggs, page 95. Minutes. Vol. II. page 172, 173.

36. Minutes. Vol. II. page 128.

37. Spelled according to early Minutes.

38. Minutes. Vol. II. page 172, 173.

39. According to John T. Kingston in the Wisconsin Historical Collection, Walker preached the first sermon at Racine in the spring of 1835. See Vol. VII. page 306, 341.

40. A copy of the contract for the building of this church may be found in Field's Correspondence, Vol. II. A. D. Fields Papers.

41. It is worth while to note that previous to this the old log house erected by William See, was used by Walker as his home and as a church. In it was also held Chicago's first school. Early Chicago, John Wentworth, No. 8. Fergus Publications, Chicago, Fergus Printing Company, (1876) page 25. Fields, A. D. "Worthies and Workers," page 103.

42. Wentworth, John "Early Chicago." No. 7, 8, of the Fergus Publications. Wentworth quotes from early records of Peoria county, of which Chicago was then a part.

county, which then included Chicago, we find that Walker was an election clerk, that he voted at two elections in 1830, that he paid taxes on fifty dollars' worth of personal property, and that he performed two weddings in 1831. After he was superannuated he kept a tavern near Des Plaines.

Bishop Morris, who knew Walker and who was associated with him in the Conferences of the church, gives an interesting picture of Father Walker and an estimate of his abilities: "That readers may form some faint idea of the personal appearance of our hero, let them suppose a man about five feet six or seven inches high, of rather slender form with a sallow complexion, light hair, small blue eyes, prominent cheekbones, and pleasant countenance, dressed in drab colored cloths, made in the plain style peculiar to the early Methodist preachers, his neck secured with a white cravat, and his head covered with a light-colored beaver, nearly as large as a lady's parasol, and they will see Jesse Walker as if spread out on canvas before them.

"As to his mental endowments, he was without education, except the elementary branches of English imperfectly acquired, but favored with a good share of common sense, cultivated some by reading, but much more by practical intercourse with society, and enriched with a vast fund of incidents, peculiar to a frontier life, which he communicated with much ease and force. His conversational talent, his tact in narrative, his spicy manner, and almost endless variety of religious anecdotes, rendered him an object of attraction in social life. Unaccustomed to expressing his thoughts on paper, he kept his journal in his mind, by which means his memory, naturally retentive, was much strengthened, and his resources for the entertainment of friends increased. He introduced himself among strangers with much facility, and as soon as they became acquainted with him, his social habits, good temper, unaffected simplicity, and great suavity of manner for a backwoodsman, made them his fast friends. As a pulpit orator he was certainly not above mediocrity, if up to it; but his zeal was ardent, his moral courage firm, his piety exemplary, and his perseverance in whatever he undertook was indefatigable. Consequently, by the blessing of God upon his labors, he was enabled, in the third

of a century, to accomplish incalculable good as a traveling preacher.^{43***} But few men, even of his day, performed more hard labor, or endured more privation, than Jesse Walker, and certainly no one performed his part with more cheerfulness or perseverance."⁴⁴

In the last few years there has been made a special effort to give Walker⁴⁵ the attention due him. In 1850 his remains were removed to a cemetery in Plainfield and a small stone placed on his grave. In 1911 a large and suitable monument was erected by the Rock River Conference and a pilgrimage made to his grave by the Conference held in 1911. Both the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, then joined in services honoring the early pioneer.

43. Morris, T. A. "Miscellany" page 180, 181.

44. Ibid., page 192.

45. Northwestern Christian Advocate. April 12, 1911. page 459.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE INSTITUTIONS OF PIONEER METHODISM

By the time Methodism reached Illinois its organization in America was complete. General Conferences were held every four years in which all Methodists were represented. The Annual Conferences were organized and were held each year. Since that time the slavery struggle which divided the church has taken place, and the democratic tendencies of our nation have introduced lay representation in the General Conference.

But the conferences are not of the pioneer period alone, nor was their influence different then than now. In those days, however, when the lone circuit rider pushed into new territory passing through new wildernesses, to conquer godless and lawless forces and to minister to the religious, it must have been a great comfort and encouragement to know that the conference which sent him, stood behind, would relieve him at the end of the year, and send another, and that the presiding elder would enter his field four times a year to aid and counsel. In addition to this annual conference, with thousands of members, there was the General Conference, which included all of American Methodism with its hundreds of ministers and thousands of members.

Other institutions¹ of Methodism which were of great value in earlier times have either practically disappeared or else have been radically changed, so as to lose their pioneer character, as the class meeting, the quarterly meeting, the camp meeting, and the log meeting-house.

1. There has been no adequate treatment of the Methodist class meeting and quarterly meeting. The literature on the class meeting constitutes instructions and description of methods. The following books are examples of this literature, "Treatise on Class Meetings," Reverend John Miley, Cincinnati, Swormstedt and Poe, 1854; "The Class Leaders Manual," Reverend Charles C. Keys, New York, Lane and Scott, 1851; "The Drillmaster of Methodism," Charles L. Goodell, New York, Eaton and Mains. The latter deals with the subject more historically. Many occasional sentences and references, too numerous to mention, are found in the writings of the early preachers. I have gone over these subjects briefly with Reverend Samuel Gardner Ayers whose reading along these lines has been extensive.

The earliest group of Methodists in Illinois were called classes. When a circuit of several classes was formed it was known as a society. When the Methodists of a new community were gathered together they were generally few in number. They were joined together and one of their number was appointed as "leader," who looked after their spiritual welfare, and collected what money they gave toward the support of the work. This head was generally the most prominent, most religious, or at least the best qualified to lead. To some degree he probably combined prominence, religion, and leadership. This class met often, usually once a week. If there were local preachers in their numbers they probably to a large degree conducted the meeting, preaching and exhorting; if there were none the leader conducted the meeting. It must be remembered that the pioneers were decidedly individualistic and it is very likely these meetings varied considerably, always according to the leaders, preachers, and members. When the number of Methodists increased in a certain community more classes were formed under different leaders.

These classes were of tremendous importance to the frontier church. Each class banded its members together in a common bond. All suffered or prospered together. Each member was protected from backsliding by the frequency of the meetings and the intimacy of the leaders and members. New members were taken in, informed, trained, and carefully guided until becoming mature in spiritual affairs. Any wayfaring member was rebuked, urged to reform, and was then either welcomed as a repented brother, or cast out as a backslider. The class increased the solidarity of the early church. The circuit rider traveling from class to class and being transferred from circuit to circuit kept these classes rigidly in the straight and narrow path of Methodist custom and doctrine.

The quarterly meetings² were great occasions in the early days. These were held every three months. These meetings usually began on Friday evening and lasted until Monday morning. All Methodists of the entire community or section of

2. Williams, Samuel W. "Early Methodism in the West." *Methodist Quarterly*, Vol. 31, page 579f. In the Methodist Safe in the Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield, Illinois, among the records of many early church trials, I found the record of a quarterly meeting held at the house of John Rutherford in the Sangamon Circuit in 1828, signed by Peter Cartwright, and C. R. Matheny.

the country were gathered together. The size of the territory drawn upon depended upon the number of members in the community, the number of appointments in the circuit, and the size of the circuit. The presiding elder, the preacher in charge of the circuit, the local preachers, the exhorters, the class leaders, and many of the members attended. The members in the neighborhood of the meeting kept open house and saw to it that their larders were well filled. Such a meeting was held in the house if the house was large enough, or in a barn which was specially arranged, or if there was a meeting-house or church in the neighborhood it was held there. When the numbers increased we find these services were out of doors in the summer time. Then it came about that camp meetings were almost invariably held in connection with these meetings when the weather would permit. Preaching services were on Friday evening, probably three or four times Saturday and Sunday, and again on Monday morning. Saturday morning or afternoon the business meeting or quarterly conference proper was held. On Sunday a "love feast," which was a large experience or testimony meeting, occurred. Later the sacrament of the Lord's Supper was celebrated. The services were usually accompanied by much excitement and warmth, conversions were common, and all enjoyed a good time. It always was a time of spiritual stimulation, regeneration, and power. The meetings were looked forward to from one time to another and were considered as occasions of great power and joy. Weak societies were often encouraged, backsliding brethren reclaimed, weak-hearted members revived. These quarterly meetings were very important to early Methodism and have generally been overlooked because of their close relationship to the camp meeting.

One of the most important of all the early institutions of the pioneer church was the camp meeting. It was not exclusively Methodist, but was suited to the Methodist's policy and belief and in their hands probably rose to its greatest usefulness. Methodism and the camp meeting seem to have had a natural affinity for one another.³

3. Howells, William Cooper "Camp Meetings in the West Fifty Years Ago," Lippincott's Magazine, Vol. 10, pages 203-212. See page 204 for this idea. This is an exceptionally well written article; it also deals very adequately with the meetings. I follow this article in many points.

The origin of the camp meeting⁴ is disputed. By 1800 the custom of holding such meetings had become well established and by 1805 they were held throughout the settled west. The accomplishments of the camp meetings are of more importance than the origin. The Great Revival⁵ of 1799-1801 occurred before any extensive settlement of Illinois had been made. But the revival had not spent itself when Methodism reached the new settlements. In fact the camp meeting and its use was just then being reduced to a system by the circuit riders. The first camp meetings⁶ held in Illinois were those conducted by the Reverend Jesse Walker in 1807. As preachers and settlers increased in numbers so did the frequency and number of these meetings.

The use of these meetings depended upon warm weather. In Illinois the first and even in later years many of the meetings of the Methodists were held in connection with the quarterly conferences. Such meetings lasted only from Friday to Monday. They were seen to be so practical that longer ones were planned and held. It is no exaggeration that these meetings were of vital importance to the spread of religion throughout the west.

The following description⁷ of a camp meeting is more typical of the later meetings. The earlier ones were similar except that they represented the younger institution from which the later developed. It must also be remembered that individual meetings varied from the average. The early ones were probably small, having small seating facilities and few camps, and the lighting system and the guards were probably but slightly developed.

The fundamental reason for holding out of doors meetings was that there were no rooms, barns, or meeting-houses large enough for the crowds. Consequently the people assembled in the woods, cut down the trees, and constructed a great open-air auditorium.

4. Cleveland, Catherine C. "The Great Revival in the West," pages 52-53. Stevens, Abel "History of the Methodist Episcopal Church." Vol. IV. page 114. Buckley follows Stevens. Methodist Magazine 1821, page 189, article by John McGee; 1819, pages 186, 222, articles by Thomas S. Hinde, both men were contemporaneous with the founding of the camp meeting.

5. Cleveland, Catharine C. "The Great Revival in the West." 1797-1805.

6. Reynolds, John. "Pioneer History of Illinois." page 264.

7. Much of this description comes from article by Howells. See foot note 3 page 57. It has been compared with several other accounts.

The tents of cloth stretched on poles, or of rough slabs of wood, were built in a hollow square inside of which was the auditorium. To one side of this hollow square, usually to the lower, was constructed the preaching stand, back of which was the preacher's tent. Extending forward from the front of the platform long rows of logs were laid, across which slabs or split logs were placed for seats. Several stands, later six, were erected, at the corners and sides of the auditorium upon which huge fires were built. The stands were about six feet in height and were covered with earth on which the fire was built. These fires furnished the light. The preacher was generally furnished with a candle by which he read his text. Later pine knots and flatheaded pieces of wood were fastened in the trees so that the entire place was well lighted. The lawless element in the frontier communities made necessary the establishing of a system of guards. The lights were kept burning and men patrolled the grounds all night.⁸

The people came in great crowds. Some came in wagons bringing bedding and food so they might stay for the entire meeting. Others rode horseback. Many walked. Hospitality prevailed if those seeking it came to the meetings in a serious frame of mind and not with the purpose of causing trouble. Many erected wooden tents or shanties which they occupied every year. It is difficult to estimate the number in attendance at the early Illinois meetings. They were like all others. The meetings during the Great Revival were probably attended by several thousand. We do not hear of such large numbers in Illinois. But the entire countryside for miles around attended, some driving thirty miles. It is very probable that in Illinois the numbers ran over the thousand mark at many meetings. It is likely that the frequency of these later ones cut down the attendance. The people lived on the grounds during the meeting. The period of the meeting was looked upon as a great festival.

An order of services and rules were agreed upon. A horn woke all at daybreak. A half-hour later it was blown for family prayers, after which breakfast was prepared and eaten. At

8. Cartwright, Peter, "Autobiography," page 158.

eight or nine o'clock prayer meetings were held in the tents. At ten there was preaching in the auditorium followed by prayer service or "mourner's meeting" as the occasion demanded, after which was the noon recess. Again in the afternoon at two there was preaching, probably followed by after-meetings with mourners. This service was generally closed at sunset, but might continue until the evening service. After the evening meals the fires were started and the place made as light as possible. The evening meeting was soon convened. With the lights and shadows of the fires and trees, and the excitement of the meeting the scene must have been weird.

The length of all the meetings depended upon the warmth and excitement. This was particularly true of the evening service, which might last till after midnight or until morning. If the service closed early there were family prayers at nine and then all retired. Sometimes meetings in the private tents were continued all night.

The program was occasionally varied. On Sunday the Lord's Supper was celebrated and those who cared to be were baptized.

If the meetings⁹ became spirited and the effect on the crowd was powerful all order and rules were laid aside and the many preachers present took turn in keeping the service going. Others were going here and there among the crowd exhorting, pleading, and praying. Great excitement and confusion generally prevailed, but by the time the work began in Illinois many of the worst extravagances were moderated. The "jerks"¹⁰ and fainting were experienced to a considerable extent in Illinois, but were not generally encouraged.

On the closing day the crowd formed in procession and marched singing around the auditorium. The preachers led the way. When the round was made back to the preaching stand the ministers shook hands with all in the procession, exhorting and encouraging or reproving each person. Often this farewell service lasted several hours and reached great heights of enthusiasm.

9. Cartwright, Peter. "Autobiography," page 53, 54, 55. These pages describe both the work of the preachers in these meetings, and the effects on the people.

10. Cartwright, pages 17, 18, 19, 39.

The singing at these meetings is very interesting. The preacher read two lines of the hymn, after which the congregation sang the lines. Every two lines were so read and sung. This reading and singing was called "lining the hymns." Watt's hymns were used most frequently. Familiar hymns were not lined. A series of rather popular religious songs grew up about the camp meeting and were much used.

The sermons were long, impressive, productive of much excitement, often two or three following one right after the other. Preachers were not used at these meetings unless they could bring results. Results were measured by conversions and general excitement and enthusiasm. The preacher¹¹ often had the task of entertaining a band of ruffians, who came to break up the meeting, and then before they were aware of it in the same vigorous but entertaining manner plunge into a sermon that would melt their hearts and overcome their opposition. The frequency with which these ministers preached made them excellent orators, and the circuit riders as a class were pulpit orators of a high degree, for the nature of the work they had before them.

While the extravagances of these services aroused the opposition of many of the cultured and educated, and led many to a wrong emphasis in religious life, yet it cannot successfully be denied that they did great good. Thousands were converted and led into a higher life. Rough and lawless bands were broken up by the conversions of their leaders and members. Not only were the numbers of the churches¹² greatly increased but the ministry was able to gather recruits from among the converts.¹³ Great revivals swept through the country as a result of several meetings.

The camp meeting had a lighter side to it. It was a great social gathering. Not all who attended were carried away with the enthusiastic. Much visiting and friendliness existed.

The log church as well as the campmeeting played its part in this pioneer period. The first Methodist church

11. Examples of this. Cartwright, Peter, "Autobiography," pages 104, 105.

12. Ibid., pages 234, 106.

13. Peter Cartwright is a good example of this as were many others of the circuit riders.

built in Illinois was erected in 1806, before the coming of Jesse Walker.¹⁴ It was located in the Goshen settlement, which is now in Madison county. Walker built a second church the following year at Shiloh in St. Clair county. These early churches and in fact all for many years were called "meeting-houses." The friends of the society would gather at the chosen location, cut down the trees, and build the house of the only material on hand. The walls were built of logs, with the cracks plastered shut with mud. The floor was made of logs hewed flat on one side, which was placed up. The surface was very rough. The benches were made of flattened logs and generally had no backs. The windows were covered with oiled paper until glass became more common. Generally there was no place for a fire. The only heat in the house was that given by an occasional foot stove carried there by some of the wealthier members. In these churches the men sat on one side and the women on the other, with an aisle separating them. In every respect these meeting-houses were of the same type as the log cabins of the settlers.

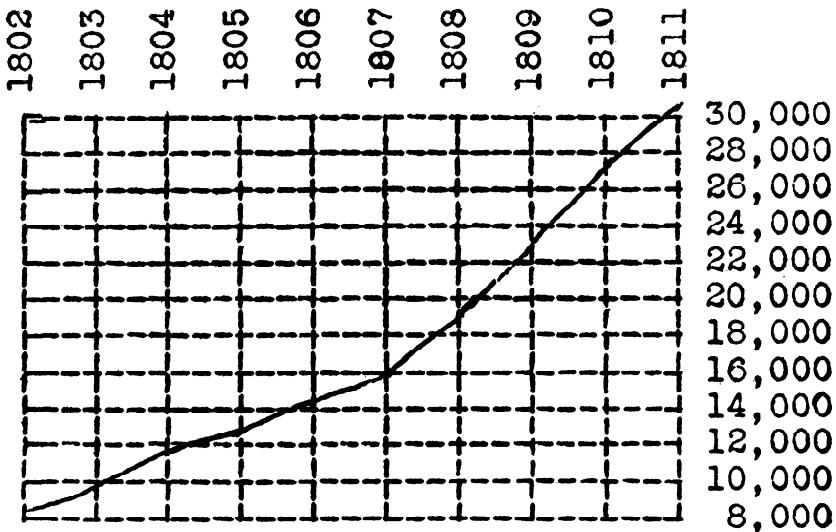
These early institutions were crude, rough, and imperfect, but they were the expressions of the times. As they were only means to the end they served their purpose well. In these early meetings on the camp grounds, in the log meeting-houses, and in the homes of the settlers, important services were held. The pioneers worshiped God in all sincerity. These services contributed much to producing not only the important men of the day, but also the high standard of rough, rugged, honest frontiersmen.

14. Leaton, James. "History of Methodism in Illinois," page 46. I have been unable to secure any account of an earlier date than Leaton. There is agreement among the few writers who speak of it.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CONFERENCES OF WHICH ILLINOIS METHODISM WAS A PART.

The growth of Methodism in the west and northwest may be ascertained from a study of the various conferences, districts, and circuits. The old Western Conference, which was

The Growth of the Western Conference

the first annual conference beyond the Alleghanies, and which just before its division¹ reached from the mountains to the Mississippi, from the regions of Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio to New Orleans, was divided into the Ohio and Tennessee Conferences, which in turn were redivided. As the conferences were divided to make many, there was a corresponding growth in the smaller units. Districts which originally included a vast territory came to be conferences.² Circuits increased to

1. Divided in 1812. For extent of this conference see the Minutes. Vol. I., pages 209-216.

2. As the Illinois, Indiana, and Missouri Districts.

districts and even to conferences.³ As the cause for these changes was the growth of the work each change is significant. As far as possible this study will endeavor to show only the growth of the work in its relation to Illinois.

The Western Conference⁴ was the organization that introduced Methodism in the West. It was formed in 1796, originally for the states of Kentucky and Tennessee. In 1804 it was enlarged⁵ to include Ohio, a part of Virginia, and the Illinois and Natchez countries. The reports of the conferences were not divided according to conference organization until 1802. That year⁶ there were only two districts, made up of thirteen circuits, ministered to by twenty-one preachers, who reported to the conference held in the fall of 1802 a total of eight thousand two hundred two members. The last⁶ year (1811) in which the work was reported as the western conference, there were ten districts, of seventy-one circuits, ministered to by ninety-three preachers, who reported at that conference session, thirty thousand four hundred seventy-two members. At the meeting of the General Conference⁷ of 1812 the Western Conference was divided into the Ohio and the Tennessee Conferences. To a considerable extent William McKendree,⁸ first as presiding elder of the Cumberland District, and then as Bishop, was the guardian angel of this conference and much of the growth of the conference and its work is due to the influence and skill of this noble man. A quotation from an early letter dated Limestone, April 13, 1804, is of interest in showing his attitude, "As I cannot attend the general conference, I think it my duty to observe to you, that the Western Conference is, in my judgment, of much more importance than many may think it to be."⁹

3. For example the early Illinois Circuit including all the work in Illinois.

5. Journals of the General Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Vol. I., page 52.

4. See previous chapter (1), The March of Methodism into the Northwest, for references and discussion in regard to the founding of this conference.

6. Minutes of the Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Vol. I., pages 104, 109, 209, 211, 212.

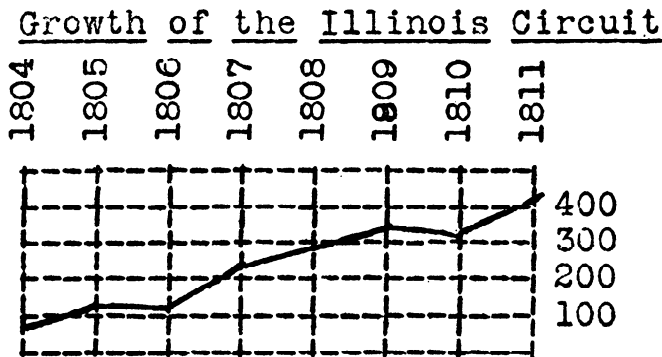
7. Journals of the General Conference. Vol. I., pages 107, 108, 109.

8. Paine, Robert. "Life and Times of William McKendree," pages 146f and 169f.

9. "Extracts of Letters Containing some Account of the Work of God Since the Year 1800." pages 92, 93.

The Methodists in Illinois while in this conference¹⁰ were a part of the Cumberland District until 1808 and then for three years were a part of the Indiana District. During this period the work grew from sixty-seven members in 1804 to four hundred eleven members in 1811.

When the Western Conference was divided the work in Illinois was placed in the Tennessee Conference, where it continued for four years. This was the period of the War of 1812. The entire Methodist church showed a decrease in membership.¹¹ The Tennessee Conference in which the Illinois work was reported was no exception. The Illinois church cannot be



checked up in this matter because during this period state lines were not even considered in the forming of circuits. By 1816 when the first report of the Missouri Conference, which was formed to include Illinois, was made the Illinois church showed considerable growth. This was contrary to the experience of the entire Tennessee Conference. The circuit system made quick recovery possible. The Illinois District which was first formed in 1812 included circuits in Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri. This district including six circuits, and as many preachers, with Jesse Walker as presiding elder, reported fourteen hundred forty members. Three years later, the last report of this work while in the Tennessee Conference in-

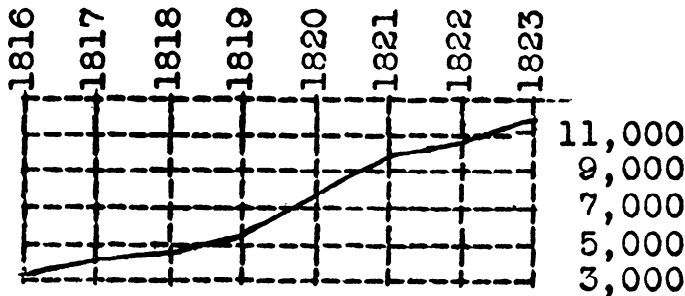
10. Minutes. Vol. I., pages 129, 182, 209.

11. Minutes. Vol. I. pages 245, 260.

cluded the Illinois District, of eight circuits, reporting one thousand nine hundred thirty-eight members, and the Missouri District, of eight circuits, reporting nine hundred forty-one members.¹²

In 1817 the Missouri Conference was organized, and was made to include the circuits in Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, and Arkansas. The first year¹³ this conference was made up of the Illinois and Missouri Districts, of nineteen circuits, traveled by twenty preachers, who reported three thousand one hundred seventy-three members. Steady growth marks the annals of this conference. It was divided into the Missouri and Illinois Conferences in 1824, but the report is combined for that year.¹⁴

Growth of the Missouri Conference



There were then five districts, forty-one circuits, sixty-two preachers, and twelve thousand five hundred forty-nine members.

Information of the growth of the church in Illinois may be had by a study of the circuits of the Illinois District. This district¹⁵ was first formed in 1812, and for two years there was only the Illinois Circuit within the Territory of Illinois. In 1814¹⁶ we find two circuits in Illinois, the Illinois circuit and

12. These facts are all taken from the Conference Reports in the Minutes. Vol. I., pages 227, 243, 258, 280.

13. Minutes. Vol. I., pages 294, 297, 298.

14. Ibid., pages 453, 454.

15. Minutes. Vol. I., page 227.

16. Ibid., page 258.

the Little Wabash Circuit. A year later¹⁷ the number was increased to five, Illinois, Okaw, Cash River, Bigby, and Wabash. In 1820¹⁸ the Indiana circuits were organized into the Indiana District, and the Illinois District may then be considered entirely an Illinois organization. It included the following circuits, Mount Carmel, Wabash, Cash River, Illinois, Shoal Creek, and Sangamo.¹⁹ There was no further change until 1823²⁰ when four new names appear on the minutes. The Mount Vernon, Mississippi, and Vermilion were new circuits, while the Okaw was named the Kaskaskia. The names²¹ of the various circuits may be found on the maps as names of towns or rivers around or along which the circuits were formed, the Illinois being excepted as the first formed and so named after the Illinois country, as the land was then called. In this way the approximate location of the circuits may be ascertained. It can be seen that the work had reached about half way up the state.

The Illinois Conference was organized in 1824.²² It then included the work of the Methodist church in Indiana and Illinois. It also included the advancing field as it penetrated Wisconsin and Iowa. In 1832²³ this conference was divided into the Indiana Conference, and the Illinois Conference. The latter included the church in Illinois and small parts of Wisconsin and Iowa. The growth of this work will be dealt with in the next chapter.

17. *Ibid.*, page 280.

18. *Ibid.*, page 363.

19. Spelled according to the early Minutes.

20. Minutes. Vol. I., page 425.

21. It is necessary to consider such a principle as only approximately true. The Mississippi Circuit stretched along that river, probably north around the neighborhood of St. Louis. The Kaskaskia may have been named either for the river or the town. But as far as the approximate location is concerned this question is of no importance.

22. Minutes. Vol. I., page 453.

23. *Ibid.*, Vol. II., page 272.

CHAPTER SEVEN

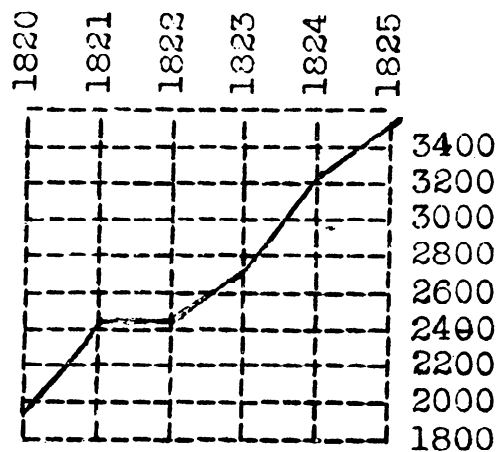
THE LATER GROWTH.

Statehood meant a new era for Illinois. The earliest settlements were confined to the American Bottom, but by 1818 the northern line of settlement had been pushed north half way up the state. The southern half of the state was by no means closely populated. The settlements followed the rivers and creeks. From 1818 to 1830 there was a vast increase in population. From the doubtful forty thousand of 1818 the population¹ had increased to one hundred fifty-seven thousand four hundred forty-five. Lines of settlement followed along the Mississippi and Illinois rivers, and along the rivers on the eastern border. The vast prairies were yet unconquered. The important events of this period were the founding of the state government, the slavery struggle, the Edwardsville Treaty with the Kickapoo Indians, and the Wars with the Winnebago Indians and with Black Hawk and his warriors.

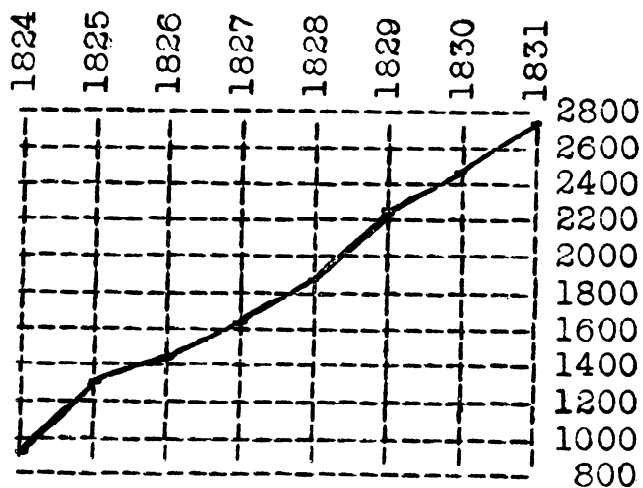
The corresponding event in the Methodist Church in Illinois to the admission of Illinois as a state in 1818 was the organization of the Illinois Conference in 1824. The conference was formed by the General Conference of 1824 to include the states of Indiana and Illinois. It was formed of two Indiana Districts and the Illinois District. The next year the Wabash District was formed, including the work along the Wabash river both in Illinois and Indiana. This district extended as far north as the Vermilion river, while the Illinois District included the Sangamon country, and the Mississippi Circuit probably reached as far north on the western border of the state. By this it will be seen that the advance of the circuit rider had followed closely upon that of the settler. In 1830 there was an important change. The work had so progressed in the Sangamon country that a district was organized by this

1. United States Census for 1830.

Growth of the Illinois District



Growth of the Illinois Conference



name. This was the third district in Illinois. It is very interesting to note that this Sangamon District included Lebanon near St. Louis, the Sangamon territory, the Salt Creek territory, Peoria, the Fox River mission, of which Chicago came to be a part, and Galena in the northwestern part of the state. Today there are four conferences with part of this old district in their bounds. The strength of the various districts was sufficient that in 1832 the Indiana Conference was organized, the state line accepted as the boundary and the Illinois Conference included only the state of Illinois, and the advancing northwest field.

To give an estimate of how much Methodism had spread over the state, the report of the Illinois Conference given at the session of the Conference in 1832 will be of service.

The Wabash District:

<i>Name of Circuit</i>	<i>Number of Members</i>
Mount Carmel	500
Wabash	768
Eugene	545
Paris	604
Shawneetown	5
Iroquois mission	10
Total Members in District.....	2432

The Kaskaskia District:

Kaskaskia	393
Golconda	210
McLanesborough	412
Mount Vernon	552
Shoal Creek	725
Shelbyville	344
Grand Prairie mission.....	303
Jonesborough mission	231
Brownville mission	156
	3326

The Sangamon District:

Lebanon	858
Apple Creek	617
Jacksonville	631
Atlas	487
Spoon River	401
Tazewell	382
Salt Creek	289
Sangamon	563
Maccoupin mission	161
	4389

The Mission District:

Deplane	34
Chicago	10
Fort Clark	48
Galena	22
Rock Island	57
	171

Total for the entire Conference, 30,352.

It is very significant to note that the church had reached Chicago, Galena, Rock Island, Peoria, the Tazewell country near Pekin, the Salt Creek territory, from which Methodism entered Bloomington, Clinton, and Decatur, Jacksonville, the Sangamon valley, which included Springfield, Shelbyville, Mount Vernon, Kaskaskia, Shawneetown, Paris, and Mount Carmel. Methodism was early in the strategic centers. Although these various communities were separated by vast stretches of wilderness, and unbroken prairie, yet the indefatigable circuit rider reached them all.

The growth in membership equally well illustrates the progress of Methodism in Illinois from 1825 to 1832. The accompanying chart describes it graphically. The growth was from thirteen thousand to thirty thousand. It included both the Indiana and Illinois churches.

The great work of the Western church was to take to the scattered settlers a religious life, a church organization, its worship and instruction. The Methodist Church in Illinois was very successful in performing this service. The early societies were formed in the house of some older Methodist or new convert. The meetings were small. Only slowly did the primitive societies outgrow the settlers' homes and require meeting-houses and school houses in which to hold their services. But the presence of the society meant the holding of regular services, preaching, the reading of the Bible, singing Christian songs, public prayer, and the instruction of the children. Methodist custom and discipline meant a strict, serious, and pious life. The influence of such meetings and customs was of great importance to a community which was in the midst of the conquest of the wilderness, and of the Indians, and whose life had yet to be established upon the basis of the ethical standards of Christian civilization.

The church often had to conquer gross immorality, indifference, and sometimes positive disbelief.² But the church was well equipped for the work and the entire period from 1800 to 1850 was marked by great revivals of religion.

The Methodist Church in Illinois, as well as in the west generally, greatly enlarged its activities. The period in which this growth occurred began shortly after Illinois was made a state. This enlargement followed certain lines and is easily traced. The establishment of Sunday Schools, Missionary Societies, and Tract Societies began in the early twenties and by the close of our period (1832) the movement was well developed. Sentiment along temperance and anti-slavery lines began to crystallize and by 1832 temperance societies were being formed, while the Methodists took a decided stand on slavery in the struggle of 1824. Education was given an early impetus in this state by the founding of McKendree college.

The founding of Sunday Schools throughout Illinois gained considerable impetus by 1832. The Methodist Church

2. It is of interest to note that the first Methodist circuit rider who came to Illinois succumbed to a band of men who advocated disbelief in God. See Reynolds, "Pioneer History of Illinois," page 219.

had to a limited extent fostered such schools from the first,³ but not until 1827, when the "Sunday School Union" was organized, had the work progressed to any large degree. From this time on the work spread rapidly. The movement soon came to Illinois. The letters⁴ which many of the preachers wrote each quarter to the Christian Advocates for these years, especially 1831, 1832, and following, reporting their work, show the presence and success of this movement in Illinois.

John Mason Peck,⁵ referred to before, says that the first Sunday School in Illinois was founded at Upper Alton in 1819. It was a union school of the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians. He also speaks of the movement in general around 1831, "The Sunday school system is awakening attention to that of common schools, and eventually, in aid of other means, will change the current of feeling of this subject."

The significance of the Sunday School for pioneer Illinois lies in the instruction given to the children, in the making of the Bible better known, and in giving it a larger place of influence in the society of the day. The coming generation grew up under a considerable different influence than the preceding. The Sunday School has proved to be a vital aid to all churches.

Illinois during this period was essentially missionary territory. Nevertheless, public opinion was trained to favor and to support missions. Missionary societies⁶ were organized, and money sent to the general society of the church. The Illinois Conference sent men to the Indians and to thinly settled communities.⁷ It is interesting to note that although Illinois

3. Stevens, Abel. "History of the Methodist Episcopal Church." Vol. IV., pages 464-467.

4. These few are only typical: Letter of John Hogan, Salem Circuit, Illinois Conference, September 6, 1829, New York Christian Advocate, October 30, 1829, page 34; Letter of John T. Mitchell, Chicago, Illinois, September 1, 1835, New York Christian Advocate, October 2, 1835, page 22; Letter of Warren L. Jenkins, Hillsboro, Illinois, June 27, 1834, Western Christian Advocate, Vol. I., page 46. July 18, 1834; Article, "Sunday Schools in the West." Western Christian Advocate, Vol. I., page 6, May 9, 1834. Also an article in the Edwardsville Spectator, August 8, 1820, "The Alton Sabbath School," Signed E. Long, Instructor.

5. Peck, John Mason, "A Guide to Emigrants." (1831) pages 238, 245-6.

6. Letter of Thomas S. Hinde, Mount Carmel, Illinois, July 26, 1820. Methodist Magazine, Vol. III., page 390 (1820) Letter of John T. Mitchell referred to in note 4, page 79. Letter of John Hogan, Salem Circuit Illinois, September 6, 1829, New York Christian Advocate, October 30, 1829.

7. Thirteenth Annual Report of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. New York Christian Advocate, May 11, 1832, pages 145, 146.

Methodists contributed to the missionary⁸ cause, more money was spent in Illinois by the Missionary Society of the Church in the United States at large than was contributed from Illinois.

Tract societies were organized in the various churches whose duty was to distribute religious pamphlets. More important than these tracts were the books the preachers had for sale. Each Methodist preacher was an agent of the Book Concern, and carried with him books which he sold.

This bringing of books and tracts into the new communities on the frontier helped to overcome the lack of intellectual life and to raise the intellectual standard, in addition to strengthening the church.

Though the church⁹ as a whole refused to take a decided stand against slavery and intemperance, Illinois Methodists did. Much of the sentiment of this nature came from the west and Illinois was true to the west. Intemperance was the predominate vice on the frontier. James Axley and Peter Cartwright were two stalwart fighters against intemperance¹⁰ and slavery. The slavery question came to an issue in the struggle of 1824. Methodist circuit riders¹¹ were so predominately against slavery that they stirred the press to bitter retorts.

The founding of McKendree College in 1828 as the Lebanon Seminary, is a significant event in Illinois Methodism. It is among the earliest colleges founded west of the Alleghanies. The service it has performed to both church and state is very worthy. It is quite significant that although many of the early preachers were untrained educationally, they did not lose sight of the value of a college.

Another development toward which Methodism in Illinois was tending by the close of this period was the city church. Although the cities were early avoided, we have seen that

8. See the reports of the Missionary Society, as in above note.

9. Stevens, Abel, "History of the Methodist Episcopal Church," Vol. IV., pages 174, 182, 445, 451, 454; Vol. IV., pages 370, 430, 451, 455.

10. Many temperance societies were formed. A typical one mentioned in the Springfield, Illinois, Journal, March 7, 1835, page 3.

11. Pease, Calvin. "The Frontier State," 1818-1848, Illinois Centennial History, Vol. 2, page 81. Buck, Solon Justus, "Illinois in 1818," Illinois Centennial. Preliminary Vol., page 261.

Methodism took up its work in many of the principal ones by 1832. The following description taken from a manuscript of A. D. Field,¹² in the possession of J. Seymour Currey in the Evanston Historical Library, is true of the city church around 1840 and shows the tendencies of the early times: "There were two or three things in which all the Chicago churches were a unit.***The pews were all straight pews, as high as the backs of the people and had doors. You went into your rented pew and closed the door and buttoned it. The pulpit was a preacher-pen. If a preacher knelt down in the pulpit he could not be seen. He went up three or four steps, went into the pulpit, and shut the door and buttoned it. The churches were lighted with lard-oil lamps.***The lights were dimmer than a tallow candle and the churches of evenings would look as dismal as a torch-lighted cave."

When the work in the cities increased men were stationed in their churches and were not required to travel a circuit. The number of members in these cities and the importance of the work would keep a man busy all of the time. These city charges were known as "stations"¹³ as distinguished from circuits.

By the end of this period (1832) the earlier pioneer days were over. Settlements had been made throughout the entire state although vast stretches of northern prairie and large spaces of wilderness still remained. The church followed the settler everywhere. In the principal settlements the Methodist class and circuit rider were to be found. In 1832 the Indiana work was placed in a conference of its own and the Illinois church made up the Illinois Conference. By this time the foundations of both church and state were firmly established and both were ready for a period of great prosperity and growth. The Methodist church has fulfilled its mission in the early pioneer days and the great state of Illinois owes much to the early preachers and institutions of the Methodist faith.¹⁴

12. A. D. Field came to Chicago as a boy in 1835 and relates this as true to his earliest remembrances of Chicago Churches.

13. See the Minutes, Beginning about 1834, for Illinois charges called stations.

14. The Methodist Church was not the only church to do pioneer work in Illinois. It has been impossible to make much of a study of the other churches, but a few facts have been noticed while studying the Methodists. As has been noted the first church to reach Illinois was the Catholic Church. During the period of this paper it made but

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December 31, 1842, page 145
 January 6, 1843, page 149
 January 13, 1843, page 153
 January 20, 1843, page 157
 March 3, 1843, page 181
 March 10, 1843, page 185

John Scripps was a Methodist minister, who participated in the earliest Methodist History in Illinois and the West. These articles are the very best kind of source material that I have found. Scripps knew Walker and was closely associated with him. He kept records from

little progress among any but the French. The first protestant minister to come to Illinois, was a separate Baptist preacher by the name of James Smith, who came in 1790. John Mason Peck, a Baptist minister, came in 1817 and for many years worked in Illinois and Missouri. He was a hard working man and very capable. The Presbyterians came in the decade of the twenties. In 1821 there was only one Presbyterian minister in the state. The Quarterly Register of the American Educational Society, for February, 1831 (Reprint in Illinois State Historical Society Journal, Vol. IV., No. 3, pages 363-364) gives a comparison of the Illinois Churches. The figures of the Methodists represent the year 1829 in the Wabash and Illinois Districts. The Wabash District included some Indiana churches so the comparison is hardly just. By 1832 the number of Methodists in Illinois considerably exceeded this figure. The comparison made is as follows: Presbyterians, 13 ministers, 24 churches, 492 communicants; Baptists, 60 ministers 80 churches, 2,432 communicants; Methodists, 25 preachers, 8,849 members. The Illinois District, which did not include all the Methodists in Illinois reported over 4,000 of the above. The total number of Methodists in Illinois was probably over 6,000.

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